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NSC BRIEFING

15 September 1956

ARAB-ISRAELI TENSION INCREASES

- I. Last week, two savage Israeli reprisal raids into Jordan, accompanied by two lesser jabs at the Egyptians in Sinai, have produced a new state of tension on Israel's borders. Arab casualties, numbering over 40, were greater than at any time since December 1955.
 - A. In reprisal for incursions by Jordan-based terrorists, an Israeli mobile unit struck into West Jordan on 11 September, literally demolishing a Jordanian police post which had allegedly been the base for Jordanian raiders. On 14 September, another Israeli unit pushed 12 miles across the Jordan border in the south (near Filat) and blew up another police post for the same reason.
 - B. A smaller Israeli raid into Egypt on 11 September is believed to have been in retaliation for terrorist demolition of the Tel Aviv-Beersheba rail line.
 1. Another Israeli raid, on 16 September, hit an Egyptian hill position overlooking the Israeli lines around the El Auja demilitarized zone, the area from which any Israeli blow against Egypt would probably be launched.
- II. In response to the Israeli reprisals, most of Jordan's army has again been concentrated in West Jordan, as part of a government attempt to reassure that area's restive population.
 - A. West Jordan's inhabitants, so-called "Palestinian arabs," now including many refugees, comprise the majority of the whole country's population.

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- B. Despite this attempt at a military display, Jordan's army and National Guard are poorly-supplied and it is not believed that they could offer effective resistance to any Israeli drive into West Jordan.
- C. Reflecting concern over Jordan's vulnerability, King Hussein flew to Iraq on 14 September in a new effort to obtain military aid.

III. As for Israel, little new mobilization has been reported. However, the strong mechanized Israeli force concentrated opposite Egypt near Beerseba, in the Southern Command, has been reinforced by units from the north.

- A. Meanwhile, the strength of Egyptian forces facing Israel in eastern Sinai has been reduced from 42,000 to an estimated 30-34,000. The withdrawals are believed to include most of the Egyptian armor.

IV. Although the Israeli government, in accordance with recent practice, has neither denied or acknowledged sponsorship of these raids, they actually represent a vigorous application of the Israeli doctrine of prompt reprisal.

- A. Israel is particularly sensitive to terrorist incursions at this time, both because of Israeli awareness of Egyptian plans for increasing the number of such raids, and because of the increased Arab capacity for conducting them. Israel is also convinced that, once the Suez issue is settled, Kassar will put new pressure on Israel.

B. In the Israeli view, the policy of retaliation will, at the least, force Arab governments to control their borders, a condition that is considered essential to the morale of Israel's border settlements.

1. Success of the Israeli border settlement program, in turn, is vital to maintenance of the flow of immigration.

C. This Israeli conviction is reflected in statements by chief of staff Dayan to army cadets on 17 September: there is "no way to protect the lives of oil and water drillers on our borders than by setting a high price on their blood. If we keep away from the border, it will cease to be our frontier."

V. Thus, Israeli retaliations may be expected to continue with increasing sharpness.

A. Should Egypt or Jordan be provoked into a sizeable military response, Israel could either continue raids into Sinai or West Jordan, or undertake a "spoiling offensive" against the Egyptians.

B. The launching of a general Israeli offensive against Egypt, however, is unlikely unless some prior understanding were reached with France or the UK. There is no evidence that such an understanding has been reached, although increased French arms shipments to Israel have been reported.

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19 September 1956

ARAB-ISRAELI TENSION INCREASES

- I. Two savage Israeli reprisal raids into Jordan last week, accompanied by two lesser jabs at the Egyptians in Sinai, have produced a new state of tension on Israel's borders. Arab casualties, numbering over 40, were greater than at any time since December 1955.
 - A. In reprisal for Jordanian incursions, an Israeli motorized unit struck into West Jordan on 11 September (map). The unit (which the Arabs claim numbered a thousand men) literally demolished a Jordanian police post which had allegedly been the base for Jordanian raiders. On 14 September, another motorized Israeli

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unit, allegedly with air support, pushed 12 miles across the Jordan border in the south (near Eilat--map). This unit--also claimed by the Arabs to number a thousand men--blew up another police post for the same reason.

- B. In a much smaller-scale operation, the Israelis went some 10 miles into Egypt on 11 September and ambushed an Egyptian patrol. This action appears to have been in retaliation for Egyptian terrorist demolition of the Tel Aviv-Beersheba rail line.
1. Another Israeli raid of unknown strength, on 16 September appears to have been aimed at reconnoitering an Egyptian hill position which overlooked ^{(S/} the Israeli lines around the El Auja "demilitarized zone" (map). It is significant

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that this is the area from which any major Israeli attack against Egypt would probably be launched.

- II. In response to the Israeli reprisals, most of Jordan's army has again been sent forward across the river into West Jordan. This move--risky from a strictly military viewpoint--is part of a government attempt to reassure that area's restive population.
 - A. West Jordan's inhabitants, so-called "Palestinian Arabs," now including many refugees, comprise the majority of the whole country's population.
 - B. Despite this attempt at a military display in West Jordan, the Jordanian army and National Guard are poorly-supplied. It is not believed that they could offer effective resistance to any Israeli drive into this area. -3-

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C. Reflecting his concern over Jordan's vulnerability, King Hussain flew to Iraq on 14 September in a new effort to obtain military aid.

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III. As for Israel, little new mobilization has been reported. The strong mechanized Israeli force concentrated near Beersheba, in the Southern Command (map) has been reinforced by units from the north. Such reinforcement has accompanied Israeli raiding efforts in the past.

A. Meanwhile, the strength of the Egyptian forces facing Israel in eastern Sinai has been reduced from 42,000 to an estimated 34,000. These withdrawals are believed to include most of the Egyptian armor.

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The Israeli government, in accordance with recent practice, has neither denied nor acknowledged sponsorship of the raids. Actually, these raids represent a vigorous application of the Israeli doctrine of prompt reprisal.

A. Israel is particularly sensitive to terrorist incursions at this time. This is because Israel [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] fears the increased Arab capacity for conducting them. Israel is also convinced that once the Suez issue is settled, and if Nasr is still in control, he will resume his pressures on Israel.

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Underlying Israel's policy of retaliation is the Israeli government's belief that such strong actions will force the Arab governments to control their borders and halt terrorist operations.

1. Safety of the border areas, the Israelis believe, is essential to the morale of Israel's border settlements.

2. Success of the border settlement program, in turn, is vital to maintenance of the flow of immigration into Israel.

C. This Israeli conviction is reflected in the statement by chief of staff Dayan to army cadets on 17 September: "there is no way to protect the lives of oil and water drillers on our borders than by setting a high price on their blood. If we keep away from the border, it will cease to be our frontier."

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Thus, we expect that further strong Israeli retaliations will occur along the uneasy frontier. Such incidents should get their fair share of headline space in the next few months. However, we still estimate that the Israelis are unlikely to initiate major hostilities against the Arabs.

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